

Changing Michigan's School Entrance Date - Here's the Truth

It's time for children to be at least 5 years of age in Michigan when they began their 13 year, formal school education. It's right for our children and right for Michigan.

There will always be the youngest in the class - True, but when the school entrance date is changed the youngest will then be older and more developmentally ready to meet the demands of the kindergarten curriculum and the rest of the student's educational years. Months in a child's life are significant in overall development and maturity.

Parents want to get their children in school - The bill contains an early entrance evaluation clause that allows for flexibility. However, when parents fully understand the advantages their child will have as a result of waiting, some will change their position on the issue. They need to know that many parents already appreciate the benefits of giving children the extra time to grow and develop, especially in view of the stamina needed to cope with or participate in the many activities available to students. Today, a resume of more than academic requirements is often necessary in higher education applications.

Parents can already hold children out - True, but many, many parents are not educated enough about the advantages of giving their child that extra developmental time and therefore don't think about how such a decision impacts the rest of the child's life. They are only thinking the child needs to be in school - the law says he/she can go to school, they are eager to think about their child beginning school or they may think they have failed if they're told their child isn't ready to start the formal 13 educational years. They don't realize that their child will be competing (in both the academic arenas and extra curricular arenas) with children whose parents have held their children out. This is much more evident as the children progress into grades beyond kindergarten. No doubt, there are many top students, who, if they had November, October, September, and even July and August birthdays that were held out, so that they would be developmentally ready in a "total way" to prepare them for success!

What about children who are out there that "need" to be in school? As long as there is a cut-off date, there will be children affected by that date, and we won't always know who they are. It's important to be concerned about the environment a child is in previous to school entrance. However, we must also be just as concerned with what takes place in the educational environment for the 13 years that follow school entry. **Making sure we do everything possible to set children up for success while maintaining high standards should be a priority. A change in the school entrance date should enhance those possibilities.** Alternative programs, such as Head Start, possibly some public and private early childhood programs, including young fives programs, can be a part of the answer for the concern about younger children needing to be in school.

Will this affect many students? Unless a school district has a Developmental or Young Fives Kindergarten program, there are probably at least 4 or so students per classroom in each grade in a school building that are overplaced because they fit the young-age category. Many of these students are struggling or just getting by. If retention is a consideration, generally it is not acceptable to most parents. A common comment by parents to retention is, "I wish we would have held our child out a year, but we're not going to retain our child now." Even if these younger children are just getting by academically, they can still be feeling frustration or struggling in other developmental areas (social, emotional, physical/motor skills). These symptoms are readily identified by experienced educators. Just getting by or struggling (which persists throughout their school years) is not what we want for the children of Michigan.

We need to change the curriculum - Developmentally appropriate curriculum is definitely important. However, with continued implementation of state mandated testing and national goals, curriculum is still going through a "push down" phase. We should be concerned about curriculum "push down" and concerned that we are not expecting from a particular age group that which they are not developmentally ready to handle. Changing the school entrance date would provide children with more developmental time, thereby increasing their readiness for formal education.

Put these children in school for a longer period of time per day - Although a longer school day and year may be on the educational horizon, we need to remember that developmentally appropriate curriculum needs to be a key component in any education change. Please consider the following: if you tried all day, everyday, to make an 8 month old walk, that child would be come frustrated, the adult would become frustrated and it would be a struggling situation. However, if one waits until the child is developmentally ready (**along with appropriate nurturing**) that child will have a positive, successful physical growth experience on which to continue his/her growth and development. The same holds true for other aspects of child development - cognitive, social, and emotional. This doesn't mean there shouldn't be programs for younger children, but they must be designed for the developmental level of those children. Often such programs should focus on play and being exposed to literature and conversation that will support them on the road to becoming good readers and support their readiness to tackle a formal educational setting. Kind of sounds like what kindergarten used to be so many years ago.

For those who think it won't make much difference - This is an issue to give more children the opportunity to have a successful encounter with their education which will directly relate to their success in life and their productivity. Therefore, it is also cost effective. These children will be less likely to be retained in a grade or be misdiagnosed as needing special education or remediation. Thus it will mean more effective use of educator time in the instruction of students who are developmentally ready for grade; it might also have an affect on class size.

Reality - If you asked people who have the information about children being older when those children begin their formal education, most people would tell us how this **issue all makes for good common sense**. For those who aren't sure about the issue, I would ask them, "Would they want their child to have the advantages to be more developmentally ready to face the rest of his/her life?" Remember, **a few months in a child's life makes a significant difference in what that child is ready to do**. I would venture to say that most parents want the best for their children. Unfortunately, many don't understand how their child's developmental level is a key to life's success. It's almost as if educated and/or maybe more affluent parents have a secret about child development and the keys to success. This is great that parents realize how important total developmental readiness is for success in school and in life. We should be pleased that there are such informed parents or we would have more children in educational jeopardy. So if we change the school entrance date, children who aren't so lucky to have had parents who have "the secret," they will now be able to at least have a more level playing field on which to use their skills to attain educational and personal success. This change can close some of the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" in our society and impact the success and productivity of our citizens. Although other educational changes may need to be made, changing the school entrance date can be a springboard for what can happen in the near future. As individuals who understand the developmental processes, we can insure that more of Michigan's children will be successful by supporting Senator Booher's Senate Bills for a change in Michigan's school entrance date.

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See attached list of research/literature supporting developmental readiness

Research/Literature with regard to the Importance of Child Development

What Am I Doing in this Grade? Dr. Louise Bates Ames

What A Difference a Day Makes - Carolyn Davidson, at the time of the writing was a School Psychologist in Indiana

You Can't Fool Mother Nature and You Can't Push Her Either, Carolyn Davidson
article from the Indiana State School Board Journal

Academic Redshirting: The Gift of Time for Developmentally Unready Kindergarteners,
Susan K. Hobson, Indiana University, presently a school principal in Indiana

Real Facts from Real Schools, Dr. James Uphoff, Wright State University

Summer Children - Ready or Not for School, Dr. James Uphoff, June Gilmore, Rosemarie Huber

The Rape of Childhood, June Gilmore, Psychologist

Developmental Education in the 1990's, Jim Grant, Executive Director of the Society for Developmental Education

I Hate School, Jim Grant

Jim Grant's Book of Parent Pages with contributions by various educators with titles such as **Ready for School? More Than Intelligence Goes to School, Seven Secrets to School Success**, Jim Grant. **Accepting the Readiness Idea**, Linda D. Pass

The Hurried Child, David Elkind

Better Late Than Early, Raymond S. Moore

Outliers, The Story of Success, references research that concludes the influence of cut-off dates as those dates relate to success. Malcolm Gladwell

The Tipping Point, How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference, Malcolm Gladwell

Michigan State University News article, Nearly 1 million children potentially misdiagnosed with ADHD - research done by Todd Elder from the Dept. of Economics. To be published in the Journal of Health Economics. Similar studies at NCSU, Notre Dame and U of Minn. arrived at similar conclusions.

Delaying Kindergarten, Effects on Test Scores and Childcare Costs, Pardee Rand Graduate School

Annual Growth For All Students, Catch-Up Growth For Those Who Are Behind, Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr, Paul Rosier

Kindergrind found in Time Magazine of November 8, 1999

NBA Developmental League

Research/Literature with regard to the Importance of Child Development

Youth Baseball cut-off date

Change in School Entrance Date in other states such as California

Prevalence of many states to have an earlier cut off date for school entrance

School Entrance Dates of Private Schools

Numerous conversations with parents, educators including reading specialists, authors, etc. regarding changing the school entrance date